

By [Jose Quintero](#)[Print Page](#)

August 16, 2016 7:52AM

Fire officials: Pilot Fire fully contained Tuesday morning

HESPERIA — Fire officials announced the 8,110-acre Pilot Fire was fully contained Tuesday morning after burning for over a week in the San Bernardino Mountains and Summit Valley.

Cal Fire made the announcement on their Twitter account just after 7:15 a.m. However, the fire's incident report was not updated Tuesday morning, still showing 96 percent containment.

The blaze remained at 96 percent over the weekend and Monday as fire crews battled with containing the lone uncontained line burning in the southeastern perimeter of the blaze.

A message left with a fire official was not immediately returned Tuesday morning.

The Pilot Fire started near Silverwood Lake on Aug. 7, quickly resulting in over 5,000 evacuation orders for homes in the southeast Hesperia, Lake Arrowhead, Lake Gregory and Crestline areas.

All evacuation orders in Hesperia and Summit Valley were lifted on Thursday and the remaining evacuations of Deer Lodge Park near Lake Arrowhead remained in effect until Friday afternoon.

Fire officials on Monday reported no structures have been damaged or destroyed. One firefighter suffered minor injuries while battling the blaze.

This story will be updated throughout the day as more information becomes available.



A firefighter hoses down dirt and ash in Summit Valley last week as fire crews moved into a clean-up mode for that area of the Pilot Fire. David Pardo, Daily Press

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160816/NEWS/160819827>

[Print Page](#)

By Daily Press Editorial Board

[Print Page](#)

August 15, 2016 5:23PM

Our View: Firefighters deserve our thanks

Many of us take firefighters for granted. Unless your house is burning or you have a medical emergency that results in a 911 call, many of us never witness firsthand the great work these dedicated professionals do.

But when major wildfires, such as the Pilot Fire, encroach on civilization, we can gain a renewed sense of appreciation and gratitude for their hard work.

According to incident command figures, more than 1,850 firefighters and other personnel battled the Pilot Fire last week. They came from the San Bernardino County Fire Department, U.S. Forest Service and other jurisdictions around the Southland.

From hand crew members and pilots of water dropping helicopters, to those who flew air tankers dropping fire retardant and drove bulldozers cutting lines to try to stop the fire's spread, all played crucial roles in preventing this 8,110-acre blaze from destroying homes or claiming lives.

Many others played key roles behind the scenes, directing resources and ensuring firefighters had all the food, water and equipment they needed, as well as a place to lay their heads for a few hours rest.

It required a mammoth effort to protect Apple Valley, Hesperia and the mountain communities.

Yet protect it they did. That not one home nor life was lost to this fire seems miraculous, especially if you take a drive down Highway 173 in Summit Valley. The devastation is incredible, yet one home after another remains standing, many protected by pink fire retardant dropped by air tankers.

There are lines of that same pink fire retardant crossing the nearby mountains and surrounding homes on Arrowhead Lake Road in Hesperia. All bear witness to firefighters' determination not to allow the flames to take any lives or destroy anyone's property.

About 12 square miles is scorched, as the fire left only black in its wake. Yet for every acre of blackened soil there comes the realization that this fire could have been much, much worse.

If not for the efforts of these brave men and women on the fire lines, so willing to risk it all for people they didn't even know, who knows what might have happened in Summit Valley or Hesperia?

The lesson learned from the Pilot Fire is our firefighters are unbelievably good at what they do. Thank God for that, and thank God for them.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160815/OPINION/160819839>

[Print Page](#)

Paws Pet Ranch owner jailed on animal cruelty charges

By Stacy Moore, Hi-Desert Star | Posted: Monday, August 15, 2016 6:20 pm

MORONGO VALLEY — Stephen Caro, owner of a property where more than 180 animals were seized in June, was arrested Monday morning and charged with 21 felony counts of animal cruelty.

Caro, 60, was arrested at 10 a.m. Monday at 9333 Bella Vista Drive, the property where he ran Paws Pet Ranch. Bail was set at \$250,000. He is scheduled to appear in a Joshua Tree courthouse today.

The county district attorney filed charges against Caro on Aug. 4, alleging he subjected 21 dogs to “needless suffering” or failed to provide them with proper food, drink, shelter or protection from the weather.

The dogs named the charges include Melanice, a dog with one eye and difficulty walking who was the subject of videos on Caro’s Paws Pet Ranch Facebook page. Melanice may have been euthanized at the Devore Animal Shelter after animal control officers seized her.

Other dogs identified by name in the criminal complaint are Jacob, Claire, Brownie and Tia. The rest are identified by breed and number.

A news release from the district attorney’s office states that 10 of the dogs and two cats were euthanized by the county animal control department after they were seized. The district attorney has not specified which animals were put down, and the number of animals euthanized has not been independently confirmed.

The news release is not clear on which of the animals taken from his property are those that Caro faces charges for, and the district attorney’s spokesman declined to comment further.

Several of the confiscated dogs have been adopted and animal control is working to find homes for the remaining animals, according to the district attorney.

Caro ran Paws Pet Ranch, a nonprofit recognized by the IRS, and collected donations for the animals' care. His Facebook page documented trips to Southern California shelters where he would pick up animals to be taken to the Morongo Valley property where he had a small house with a detached garage. Kennels and cages in the backyard contained other dogs, along with rabbits, ducks and chickens.

“This is a situation in which the defendant misled the public into thinking the money they were donating was being used to care for the dogs at his pet rescue,” District Attorney Mike Ramos said. “Unfortunately, the conditions the animals were forced to live in were absolutely deplorable.”



Animal control operation

San Bernardino County animal control investigator Christy Hamrick takes a cage full of kittens from Stephen Caro's Morongo Valley house June 24.

Caro has not responded to requests to comment about the investigation. On Facebook, he and his supporters have said the animals were better off at his property than they are in government animal shelters. "Paws accepted, often under unimaginable pressure, the oldest, sickest and most difficult-to-place animals; animals that were often facing death and whom, sadly, nobody else was willing or able to take in," Dean Krull, who identified himself as the new president of Paws Pet Ranch, wrote in one public post.

Animal control officers seized 11 live dogs from Caro's property June 22 after finding the body of a shepherd mix that had been chained up without water or shade, according to accounts from Caro and animal control.

Officers returned June 24 and took the remaining animals from the house and yard.

Most of them, including 75 dogs, 11 chickens and two rabbits, were taken to the county's Devore Animal Shelter. Forty more animals are at the town of Apple Valley's animal shelter, and Yucca Valley's shelter is housing 40 cats.

Caro petitioned the court on July 21 asking for a judge to order the county not to euthanize any more of the seized animals.

A judge denied the petition.

Paws Pet Ranch continues to solicit donations on Facebook and on its website.

San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Clergy ask for violence intervention in San Bernardino

By Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Monday, August 15, 2016



SAN BERNARDINO >> Clergy members delivered more than 1,000 petitions during Monday's City Council meeting calling on officials to prioritize violence prevention and intervention programs.

Specifically, the group — led by Inland Congregations United for Change — asked that the City Council commit to earmarking 40 percent of the money raised by the Measure Z sales tax passed in 2006 for violence prevention programs modeled on Oakland's Ceasefire program.

From 2012, just before Ceasefire's full implementation, until 2014, Oakland saw shootings drop from 557 to 411 and homicides drop from 126 to 80, according to that [city's website](#). Other cities using other versions of Ceasefire have also seen large reductions in homicide.

ICUC organizer Sergio Luna said the group has studied Ceasefire since 2013, and they've [marched regularly](#) for the last year to ask for commitments to it.

"Residents have been paying for this since they passed Measure Z in 2006," Luna said before the meeting. "Until we use it for prevention measures, more kids, more teenagers, more young adults are going to be dying in the streets."

Measure Z is a 0.25 percent tax voters approved in 2006 along with Measure YY, which stated that the proceeds of Measure Z "be used only to fund more police officers and support personnel, and to fund anti-gang and anti-crime operations, including drug resistance education and supervised after-school youth activities."

Despite that advisory measure, the money has gone directly to the city's general fund — used for services including police, but also including most other city services.

Mayor Carey Davis, City Manager Mark Scott, council members and police officials traveled to Oakland in July [to study the Ceasefire](#) program there. The visit was promising, but more study is needed before any commitments could be made, Davis said afterward.

Clergy from multiple local churches came Monday to say something needed to be done.

"We're the ones that are dealing with the pain of the loss to grandmothers, fathers, nieces, nephews and sons," said the Rev. Norman Copeland of St. Paul AME Church. "You're the ones who can solve this. ... The programs have been proven to work."

Early Monday morning, police found a 33-year-old man, [Shonta Edwards](#), shot and killed in the 1900 block of Little Zion Manor Drive. That marks the 45th homicide for the city in 2016 — one more than were killed all of last year, including the 14 killed in the Dec. 2 terrorist attack at the Inland Regional Center.

That's concerning, but the problem didn't start this year, Luna said.

"Since 2005, it's almost 500 people that have died in this city," he said. "And we passed this measure in 2006. All the teenagers and young adults who have died in the city, in a sense we can track it to a lack of follow-through on Measure Z."

Luna said he knew council members couldn't respond Monday, but he hoped to meet with them soon for follow-up discussions.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/government-and-politics/20160815/clergy-ask-for-violence-intervention-in-san-bernardino>

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Search For Elderly Woman Focuses On Remote San Bernardino Area

LOS ANGELES (CBSLA.com) — Authorities searched the remote areas of San Bernardino County on Monday for an “at-risk” Huntington Beach woman after her vehicle was found in the area.

Police are also asking for the public's help in locating Willie Jim Norman, 81, who has dementia and was last seen Tuesday at her home in Huntington Beach.

She is black, 5 feet tall and weighs about 145 pounds. She has brown hair and brown eyes.

Norman's SUV, a blue Jeep Cherokee, was discovered by a hiker on an isolated road northwest of Lytle Creek, nearly 70 miles from her home.

Hot weather is a concern to search crews in the area with dogs and deputies on ATVs.

“She doesn't know that area,” Huntington Beach Police Officer Jennifer Marlatt said. “She may not last long without food and water and the inability to get back to her car.”

According to Norman's family, she has a daily routine where she travels 2 miles from home to run errands and work out.

Her daughter told Huntington Beach police her mother did not show for her usual workout at noon Tuesday at her 24-hour Fitness Center. Medicine for dementia and blood pressure, which she needs to take daily, were also left at her home.

Anyone with information regarding Norman is asked to contact Sheriff's Dispatch at (909) 387-8313

San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

J.C. Penney to hold two hiring events for new San Bernardino store

By Jim Steinberg, The Sun

Monday, August 15, 2016



SAN BERNARDINO >> J.C. Penney is looking to fill more than 200 new jobs as it prepares to open [its Inland Center store](#).

There will be two special hiring events.

The first event will be from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at the Inland Center Mall, 500 Inland Center Drive.

The second event will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 25-26 at the San Bernardino Employment Development Center at 658 E. Brier Drive.

[J.C. Penney will occupy](#) a two-story, 138,000-square-foot anchor spot at Inland Center that was occupied by Gottschalks until that company went out of business in 2009. Macy's, Forever 21 and Sears occupy the remaining anchor spots at the mall, which has more than 100 specialty stores and restaurants.

"As national retailers are increasingly selective about where and how they choose to expand, we are tremendously pleased that J.C. Penney, a top department store and household name, will be opening at Inland Center," San Bernardino's Deputy City Manager Bill Manis said in February in a statement.

Recruiters will seek department supervisors, replenishment and support associates, and commission and noncommission sales associates.

There are also positions for beauty consultants and hair stylists.

Interested persons may view positions and apply online at www.jcpcareers.com.

J.C. Penney has 1,200 locations, including in Redlands and Rancho Cucamonga, according to its website.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/business/20160815/jc-penney-to-hold-two-hiring-events-for-new-san-bernardino-store>

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Why GOP candidate Paul Chabot doesn't want an immigration official to be honored

GOP congressional candidate Paul Chabot denounces former field office director's actions following Dec. 2 attack

By Jeff Horseman, The Press-Enterprise

Monday, August 15, 2016



Inland Republican congressional candidate Paul Chabot on Monday denounced an award nomination for a federal immigration official who has been criticized for stonewalling agents on the hunt for a suspect connected to the Dec. 2 San Bernardino terror attack.

Irene Martin, former San Bernardino field office director for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, was nominated for a valor award, although she did not receive it, according to a statement from the agency.

“This would not happen on my watch. It is a disgrace to learn that a person who acted improperly, lied to, and hindered investigators would be considered for such an accommodation,” Chabot said in an emailed statement.

Chabot is running against Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Redlands, for the 31st Congressional District, which includes Redlands, Rancho Cucamonga, Loma Linda and Grand Terrace. Aguilar's campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The San Bernardino immigration field office is about 2 miles from the Inland Regional Center, where Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, opened fire during a holiday gathering of Farook's co-workers from the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health.

Fourteen people were killed and 22 wounded. Farook and Malik died hours later in a shootout with police.

Martin could not be reached for comment Monday. The immigration agency responded to a request for an interview with her by sending a statement.

In its statement, the agency said Martin was nominated for the award in March “based solely on her actions to ensure the safety, security and well-being of her employees and USCIS' customers who were in the waiting rooms on Dec. 2, 2015 ... when the field office was in lockdown.”

Martin “took it upon herself to go to the parking lot to escort an employee back to the office to ensure the employee's safety during the lockdown. The employee was returning from lunch and would not have otherwise been able to seek secure shelter in the (USCIS) building,” the statement read.

“Furthermore, Ms. Martin took the time to address USCIS' customers and seek their patience through the lockdown,” the statement added. “Finally, she made arrangements for a counselor to address the staff understanding how stressful this event may have been for her employees.”

A review board considered Martin's nomination “and Ms. Martin was not recommended to receive the award,” the statement read.

According to a U.S. Department of Homeland Security inspector general report issued June 1, five armed federal agents in tactical gear arrived at the immigration field office around 12:30 p.m. Dec. 3 looking for Enrique Marquez Jr. of Riverside and his wife, Mariya Chernykh.

The agents believed the couple would be at the center, where they had a scheduled appointment. Agents sought to prevent another attack and detain Marquez and Chernykh for questioning.

Marquez currently faces federal charges of terrorism conspiracy and illegally obtaining the assault rifles used in the attack. He also is accused of entering a sham marriage with Chernykh, whose sister is married to Farook's older brother.

Martin made the agents wait roughly an hour while she sought authorization to allow them to search the building, even though the agents said they were looking for Marquez and Chernykh in connection with the terror attack, the report found.

Martin told the agents they could not detain, arrest or interview anyone in the building, but no such policy exists, the report read.

Martin denied telling the agents they couldn't arrest anyone, but her testimony was contradicted by other witnesses, the report found. The report also criticized Martin for not being candid with investigators.

Marquez and Chernykh never checked in for their appointment, but agents said Martin initially refused to give them Chernykh's file. The agents should have been able to see the file, the report found.

The report concluded that Martin "improperly delayed (Homeland Security) agents from conducting a lawful and routine law enforcement action, but when the field office director elevated the situation to her supervisors, the situation was corrected."

Following the attack, Martin was transferred to the Los Angeles field office and promoted to acting deputy district director.

Chabot, an Iraq War veteran and reserve naval intelligence officer who lost to Aguilar in 2014, is touting his military experience in his campaign.

Chabot has issued "terrorist hunting permits" to donors and has accused Aguilar of not doing enough to keep his district and country safe. But Aguilar, a former Redlands mayor, has out-fundraised Chabot to this point, and independent political analysts expect Aguilar to win re-election in November.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160815/why-gop-candidate-paul-chabot-doesnt-want-an-immigration-official-to-be-honored>

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The other danger to police safety: driving

Agencies are trying to reduce fatalities from crashes, which are responsible for most accidental deaths

By Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

Tuesday, August 16, 2016



Deputy Joshua Gile looked straight into the camera and made an emotional plea to his San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department brothers and sisters.

"We never go 10-8 without our guns, so why would you go 10-8 without your belt?" Gile said, using the police code for beginning patrol.

Gile, who choked up during the sheriff's driver-training video, recounted the 2014 collision that mangled his patrol car.

"Due to the fact that I'm wearing my safety belt, I suffered only minor injuries," he said.

Gile's testimony is part of a campaign being waged by individual law enforcement agencies nationwide to change a culture of seat belt usage, and for good reason: From 2013 to 2015, during the period the FBI has published this specific data, more than three-fourths — 32 of 41 — of the officers killed in automobile crashes were not belted in.

Demanding that cops wear seat their belts is part of a larger effort, ratcheted up in recent years, to improve officer driving safety.

Law enforcement leaders know the grim truth: In the 15-year-period from 2001 to 2015, officers were more likely to die from all manner of on-duty accidental deaths — falls, mistaken shootings, training mishaps and crashes among them — than assaults, according to FBI data. And in than same span, almost two-thirds of the accidental deaths happened in traffic crashes.

While no one is minimizing the seriousness of headline-making attacks on police, the crashes, which put the public in danger as well, have had important implications on law enforcement agencies. Some in Southern California have formed special safety committees to prevent crashes and mandated more driver training than is required.

"We stress to our officers constantly, don't drive over your head," San Bernardino police Lt. Rich Lawhead said. "You're no good to anybody unless you get there safely. You can't help your partner if you are wrapped around a tree."

Los Angeles County sheriff's Sgt. Robert Hill, whose Traffic Service Detail investigates crashes involving deputies, said "a lot" are preventable and that many happen because of poor judgment and deputies' desire to help the public.

"They want to get there as fast as they can ... Sometimes they forget the laws of physics, that the car can't do what they think it can do," Hill said.

OFFICERS REMINDED TO BUCKLE UP

Although the state vehicle code exempts officers from wearing seat belts, all the Southern California agencies surveyed require their use, some with the caveat that officers may remove them if they are expecting to have to leave their cars quickly for their own safety or to apprehend a suspect.

Signs at the Riverside police parking lot gates remind officers to buckle up. Long Beach police, a few years back, began tracking whether officers in crashes were belted in and how that influenced their injuries.

Hemet police officers did not have to buckle up until Chief Dave Brown made it mandatory this month.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Brown said.

Below 100, an organization trying to decrease the number of annual on-duty deaths, lists wearing a seat belt as its No. 1 tenet.

“There’s been a shift in the way law enforcement pushes that,” said San Bernardino’s Lawhead. “There used to be a feeling that you would be trapped behind the wheel if you wore your seat belts.”

“A lot of that mentality has slowly seeped its way out of the job,” San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan said.

His department suffered a tragedy in November 2015 when Officer Bryce Hanes was killed in a collision in Ontario with Archie Green III. Hanes was not wearing his seat belt, the FBI said. Green, who authorities say ran a red light, has pleaded not guilty to charges that include gross vehicular manslaughter and driving under the influence.

Burguan said it was unclear whether the seat belt would have saved Hanes.

OFFICERS MUST MULTITASK, BUT SAFELY

Much is asked of a police officer behind the wheel. He or she must watch for violators and criminal acts, look at and operate the computer, listen to and operate the radio and listen for cries for help. And, on top of that, drive safely.

“If you were going to get into a patrol car today, it is vastly different than the patrol car I drove,” said Orange County Assistant Sheriff Linda Solorza. “Some of these cars look like cockpits. ... To be successful in this profession, you have to be very good at multitasking and doing it safely.”

“It’s one of the more challenging things we see with new law enforcement officers, trying to keep all this stuff together,” Long Beach police Lt. Kris Klein said. “Our training is geared toward that.”

Law enforcement agencies encourage driver safety using a variety of tactics. The appeals can be emotional as well as practical.

Riverside police will sometimes show officers a patrol car that has been in a crash, or talk about a collision at roll call, Lt. Christian Dinco said.

The Orange County Sheriff’s Department created an educational campaign in 2013 that focused on seat belt use, speed and distracted driving, Solorza said. Deputies were invited to create a slogan, and they came up with “For your partners, for your families.”

In a video, a deputy who had been ejected from his vehicle in a crash explained what it was like opening his eyes in a hospital and seeing his wife “scared to death,” Solorza said. Another video places a young girl in a patrol car with her father. She asks him if he’s going to buckle up.

The department found that all deputies involved in 37 recent crashes were belted in, Solorza said.

John Fogerty, a civilian deputy chief in San Bernardino County, said Sheriff John McMahon came to him two years ago and said “We have a problem. We have too many traffic accidents.”

So a committee was formed that looked at policies, procedures and discipline. A crash review board that meets monthly looks for patterns.

In Long Beach, every pursuit and crash is reviewed to determine whether discipline or additional training is needed, Klein said.

OFFICERS TAUGHT SELF CONTROL

Joel Crawford, his patrol car’s emergency lights flashing and siren screaming, slowed as he rolled up next to another vehicle that was stopped for a red light at an intersection. Crawford made eye contact with the other driver and motioned him to hold in place before Crawford proceeded.

Crawford’s maneuver, at the Frank Bland Regional Training Center in Devore, showed how he said that situation is supposed to be handled — not like it is in the “wild and crazy” stunts such as blowing through red lights and dramatic skids seen on television crime shows.

“Self control is a huge issue,” said Crawford, a San Bernardino County sheriff’s training specialist.

Cadets at the sheriff’s academy receive 40 hours of driver training, eight in the classroom and 32 behind the wheel. Until a few years ago, they received only 16 hours of driver training. Police officers must receive a four-hour refresher course in driving every two years. The Sheriff’s Department requires eight hours.

The Emergency Vehicle Operations Center, which trains cadets and officers from all over Southern California, features a city grid, high-speed maneuvers track and a skid pan to simulate icy driving conditions.

In the classrooms, which are ringed with posters showing smashed police cars and safety messages, seemingly no detail is too small. Students are taught about vehicle physics, following distance, vehicle inspection, managing peer pressure to get to calls in a hurry and even parallel parking. Because most collisions happen with other vehicles coming from the left, Crawford said, students are taught to look to the left, then the right and then back to the left before proceeding.

With practice, officers can learn to control their cars when they go into skids. A steady stream of water is pumped onto the polished-concrete skid pan, where Crawford successfully demonstrated how to put a car into a slide and pull it out. He then turned the wheel over to a reporter, who repeatedly flunked the test by spinning the car like the Teacups at Disneyland.

“We can minimize all our accidents if we apply ourselves correctly,” Crawford said.

But even with additional training and the emotional videos, Hill, the LA County sergeant, said crashes are inevitable.

“I still believe driving, whether your’re Dale Jr. (race car driver Earnhardt) and you drive for a living at high speeds and high stress, or a brand new driver, that driving on the roads is the most dangerous thing you do every day,” Hill said.

FACTBOX

California officer deaths since 1990

Homicides: 125

*Accidental: 126

Fatal crashes: 111

The accidental deaths include the fatal crashes

SOURCE: State Attorney General's Office, Police Officers Memorial Fund

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/government-and-politics/20160816/the-other-danger-to-police-safety-driving>

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Here's why military drones will be flying over Inland skies

By [MARK MUCKENFUSS](#)

2016-08-15 19:01:53



Inland Empire residents may look up in the coming weeks and catch sight of the same military drones used to target suspected terrorists in such troubled places as Iraq and Pakistan.

These MQ-9 Reapers will not be on the hunt, however. Instead they will be flying training missions as new pilots with the California Air National Guard's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing learn how to operate the aircraft from computer consoles at March Air Reserve Base.

The 163rd has been flying drone missions for years. The wing's mission is split between surveillance and combat missions in the Middle East and training operations. The drones used for pilot training have been based at the Southern California Logistics Center in Victorville – the former George Air Force Base. Over the next few months, however, the drones will be relocated and will begin flying out of March, making their way to the high desert.

The training space for the Reapers will still be over Edwards Air Force Base. But Col. Dana Hessheimer, commander for the 163rd, said that by relocating the instructors and pilots to March, it will save commuting time, allow for additional training and enable the operation to expand. He hopes to double the size of the training operation – from 40 to 80 personnel – in the next two years.

What he doesn't want, is for local residents who see the drones to freak out.

"I don't want it to be a surprise, to see an MQ-9 fly out of March and have a big pile-up on the 215," Hessheimer said.

He said the National Guard has been working with the FAA and local governments to get airspace clearance and to meet environmental impact requirements for issues such as noise, air quality and public opinion.

"We wanted to make this as transparent as possible," he said. "It's been a total joint effort."

While Reapers are used as offensive weapons in the Middle East, carrying bombs and hellfire missiles, the ones flying locally will not be armed, although they may carry munitions that are not live so that pilots learn how the plane handles when loaded with weapons.

Hessheimer said he hopes to add two or three more Reapers to the six the wing already has. That and locating the planes at March will be a good thing for the base.

"If there is such a thing as BRAC-proofing," he said, referring to future action by Congress that might pare back on military bases, "having (the Reapers) here, makes us look better."

In a statement, base commander Brig. Gen. Russell Muncy said the addition of the Reapers is an important addition to the scope of March's operations.

He said the addition would help the base "stay relevant, mission-ready, and poised for a successful future."

Concerns have been raised in recent years about the increasing use of drones for surveillance and their potential use by law enforcement agencies.

Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington D.C., said that while he knew of no instances of military drones conducting domestic surveillance, having clear guidelines is critical.

"I would want to see good rules in place to ensure that these aren't repurposed for surveillance," Stanley said. "There is a history in this country of the military getting involved in domestic surveillance.

"If that thing flew over my house," added Stanley, a former Riverside resident, "I would want to know that the military had in place strong policies governing exactly what kind of video surveillance and photography is being carried out. I think a lot of Americans feel that way."

Hessheimer said strict policies already are in place and that the Reapers are prohibited from any form of domestic surveillance.

"It is illegal for the military to spy on the American public," he said. "People are kind of scared of the military flying these things. But the news helicopters are violating their rights more than we ever have, because we have restrictions."

Those restrictions, he said are sometimes more stringent than he would like them to be. During the massive Rim Fire, in and around Yosemite, in 2013, a Predator drone, flown by the 163rd, was used to assist firefighters by determining the perimeter of the fire and finding hot spots. But Hessheimer said more could have been done.

"I can't just send an MQ-9 out," he said. "It has to be approved by the Secretary of Defense."

When the wing responded to the Rim Fire, its Predator had to fly past the Fish Fire burning in the Sequoia National Forest. Hessheimer said it would have been easy for the drone to do a quick 10-minute survey of that fire's perimeter, but the wing did not have clearance from the Department of Defense to do so.

"We couldn't even put our sensors on it," he said.

He sees opportunities for the wing to respond to future fires and perhaps major earthquakes. Contingency plans already have been written for such possibilities, he said, which should expedite the wing's response time.

What it won't be doing is competing with the drones Amazon is talking about putting into the air.

"We're not going to be delivering packages," Hessheimer said. "I can say that with 100-percent certainty."

Contact the writer: mmuckenfuss@scng.com or 951-368-9595

Salton Sea expert: 'It's becoming a biological and public health problem'

by AirTalk August 15, 10:21 AM



An abandoned fishing business is seen next to the North Shore Yacht Club at the Salton Sea, California. California's largest lake is facing major environmental problems with a decreasing water level, increasing salinity and algae issues. MARK RALSTON/AFP/Getty Images

The Salton Sea, the state's largest lake, was born by accident when an engineering mistake sent a flood of water from the Colorado River into a salt sink. But more than a century later, it might be human inaction that causes its death.

At the height of its allure in the 1950s and 1960s, the Salton Sea was surrounded by resorts and visitors. But the lake has been shrinking rapidly as the drought worsens and water resources are diverted away from the region. A 2010 plan approved by California lawmakers was supposed to jumpstart restoration efforts, but according to the [Los Angeles Times](#), funding for the project has not come through until June this year.

Environmentalists are fed up at the delay, and want state officials and regulators to step up their game. Meanwhile, the Salton Sea's ecosystem is dying, which was home to many species of fish and wildlife. And dust blowing from the dry lakebed has posed serious health threats to neighboring communities.

AirTalk spoke to two experts to find out the consequences of inaction for the Salton Sea, and how the state is trying to avoid ecological disaster in the Imperial and Coachella Valleys.

Timothy Bradley is the director of the Salton Sea Initiative at UC, Irvine. He emphasized that if the Salton Sea dries up, the biological and public health consequences for Southern California will be dire.

What would happen if the Salton Sea was allowed to dry up?

Timothy Bradley: There would be two consequences. One is biological. The Salton Sea is the most important feeding ground on the Pacific Flyway for many many species of birds. Although it is only 100 years old, previously those birds fed in the marshes in the Central Valley, which are now gone. Or, marshes along the coast, which have been developed, or at the delta of the Colorado river, which is now completely dry.

There's another problem in addition to the biological ones, and that's public health. If the Salton Sea should dry up, and even if it begins to dry down, there will be beaches along the shore which will be the source of toxic dust. This is an immediate problem for those who live in that area and California [as a whole].

It's toxic because of the material that's associated with the dust, which includes heavy metals, agricultural chemicals, and of course the salt. These tiny dust particles, carry these toxic particles deep into the lungs, and it's well recognized that this dust is going to be a very serious problem for that part of California.

In January of 2018, the Quantitative Settlement Agreement, which is a contract to remove water from the Imperial Valley and carry it to coastal regions, will lead to the sea declining much more rapidly. So that's a critical deadline that we need to be conscious of. That's just a year and a half away that a very serious public health and environmental problem is going to be exacerbated in Southern California.

Bruce Wilcox is the Assistant Secretary at the California Natural Resources Agency, and he is the point person for Salton Sea policy for the state. He said the state has short-term fixes in the works, but they are still working on a comprehensive plan to protect the future of the lake.

What's California's plan for the Salton Sea?

Bruce Wilcox: Our plan is to start building habitat around the edges of the sea in an incremental manner that will provide stable habitat for the fish and the birds moving forward using agriculture return flow water. That plan is probably a 5 to 10 to 15 year plan. We can continue to build that habitat for that length of time. There also is a perimeter lake plan that's finalized in that.

The longer term plan hasn't finalized yet, but the plan is to have a draft done by the end of this year. That draft will outline what we think we need to do at the Salton Sea.

TB: The State needs to recognize the urgency of this. For example, we don't have good data about what's going on [the lake's tilapia population]...Cal Fish and Game could be providing this information. With regard to the dust problems, Cal EPA needs to be involved...Think about hundreds of thousands of people in the Coachella and the Imperial Valleys whose public health is at risk. [Bruce Wilcox] is doing a great job, [but] the entire state apparatus needs to really realize that this is a very serious problem that needs to be addressed.

How will California pay for this?

BW: At the state level, the legislature has recognized the problem and is moving forward. One of the issues we have is that there are so many well deserving projects across the state of California that need funding and money, that the funding doesn't go as far as it should.

One of the tasks that the [[Salton Sea Task Force](#)] gave us is develop a funding plan to pull these projects all together. One of the components of that is dealing with the federal government and seeing where we can find additional funding. Maybe there is private sector funding available. The Salton Sea Authority is an example. It's looked into an incremental financing district that might be able to help fund restoration or management at the Salton Sea.

It's a complex problem that's going to cost a lot of money, and it's a long term problem that's going to cost money for quite a few years.

How much will it cost?

TB: The price of this is going to be in the billions of dollars, no matter what we do. There's been [a study by Michael Cohen](#) that if nothing's done the cost to California would be \$40 billion. So, the 3 or 4 billion that we're going to spend there is money well spend.

The \$40 billion is the cost of doing nothing -- that would be the environmental costs, the public health costs, the economic costs to land values. It's a huge huge burden. By stepping in the state can actually save a great deal of money and help the state out.

Guests:

[Timothy Bradley](#), director of the Salton Sea Initiative at UC, Irvine. He is also a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the school

Bruce Wilcox, Assistant Secretary at the [California Natural Resources Agency](#), in charge of Salton Sea policy

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Bill to make some police body cam footage private advances

Police departments would be prohibited from releasing recordings of an officer's death or serious injury under legislation advancing in the California Legislature.

The bill approved in the Senate in a 23–6 vote on Monday would allow footage to be released only with the permission of an officer's family or a judge.

Democratic Sen. Ben Hueso of San Diego says the children of a slain officer shouldn't have to see footage of his death on the internet.

Critics from both political parties say it's not in the public interest to give surviving relatives a veto over the release of footage. They also say it will cause confusion if relatives disagree.

AB2611 by Assemblyman Evan Low of Campbell returns to the Assembly, which previously approved it but must agree to Senate changes.

The bill was one of several that advanced through the state Senate or Assembly on Monday.

Taxpayer donations

Senate Bill 1476 would get taxpayers' donations into the hands of charities more quickly — this following a critical report by The Associated Press.

Democratic Sen. Bob Hertzberg of Van Nuys wrote that bill after an AP investigation found at least one-tenth of all charitable donations made on tax returns went unspent last year.

AP's review found nearly \$10 million in 29 funds was awaiting delivery to or distribution by state agencies and another \$278,000 had reverted to state coffers.

Hertzberg says taxpayers have donated about \$100 million through the check-off system since 1982.

His bill would continuously appropriate the aid and retire a fund if taxpayers provide less than \$250,000 in one year.

The Assembly unanimously approved the bill Monday, sending it to the Senate.

Pets in hot cars

Under Assembly Bill 797, which was unanimously approved in the Senate, Californians who break into hot vehicles to rescue distressed dogs would be protected from lawsuits.

The bill by Republican Assemblyman Marc Steinorth of Rancho Cucamonga says bystanders are not liable for property damage or trespassing claims if they rescue an animal from a locked vehicle. They could only break in

if they've called authorities and believe the animal is in imminent danger.

They must turn the animal over to responding law-enforcement or animal control officers. Steinorth says good Samaritans shouldn't fear a lawsuit.

The California Federation of Dog Clubs opposes the legislation. The organization says a rescuer could risk being bitten or may inadvertently allow a dog to escape.

The bill returns to the Assembly.

Age discrimination

The Senate is also backing an effort to combat age discrimination in Hollywood.

Democratic senators approved AB1687 in a 25–12 party-line vote on Monday.

The bill would allow actors, actresses and directors to ask that their ages and birthdates be removed from websites that provide employment services. It was requested by the Screen Actors Guild.

Proponents say that making it harder for casting directors to know an actor's age will make them less likely to discriminate. The bill says the websites shall remove such information within five days, but does not include sanctions for failing to do so.

Republican Sen. Joel Anderson of Alpine says the state can use existing anti-discrimination laws to protect actors.

Democratic Assemblyman Ian Calderon of Whittier wrote the measure, which now returns to the Assembly.

Selling criminals' belongings

Lawmakers are advancing legislation to prevent California police from prematurely selling suspected criminals' belongings.

California law already requires that a person be convicted before police can seize cash or property valued under \$25,000 that's believed to have been attained illegally.

Democratic Sen. Holly Mitchell of Los Angeles says police work around that law by partnering with federal agencies to seize assets and reap millions of dollars.

SB443 would prohibit law enforcement agencies from profiting off of those partnerships in cases of suspected drug activity. It would increase the ceiling for other crimes to \$40,000.

The Assembly sent SB443 back to the Senate on a 66–8 vote Monday.

The Assembly denied it in September, but lawmakers since won support from police after adding the drug-case restriction and exempting dead or evasive suspects.

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